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FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6765
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 7691
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 5048
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 8959
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 6180
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3394
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 0636
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 3615
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3912
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 5316
RUEHPO/AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO 0316
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 6017
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0646
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 0985
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO 2198
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LA PAZ 000538

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/08/2018
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [BL](#)
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: MAS MOB ATTACKS PEACE PROTEST

REF: LA PAZ 445

Classified By: A/DCM Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b),(d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) A small peace protest against Evo Morales' government organized by university students turned violent on Thursday night when a mob affiliated with the ruling Movement Towards Socialism Part (MAS) violently disrupted the gathering. The police resorted to tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds. Contacts tell us the MAS mob was orchestrated by Minister of Government Rada. Opposition parties and the media were quick to denounce the attacks on freedom of expression. It would appear that in government-controlled La Paz only MAS militants are allowed to freely voice their opinion. End summary.

PROTEST TURNS VIOLENT

¶2. (U) Thursday night's protest in Plaza Alvaro (approximately six blocks from the Embassy) was the third anti-Evo protest organized by university students. Around 7 p.m. students as well as others began congregating in the plaza, displaying banners and signing the national anthem. The protesters were being protected by 200 policemen surrounding the outside of the square. At approximately 8 p.m. a mob of approximately 150 MASistas tried to forcefully break through the police cordon and take over the square. The MAS mob was carrying sticks, whips, and rocks, which they began to throw at the protesters. In response to the mayhem the police tear gassed the crowd and brought in water cannons. Two of the peace protesters were reported injured. The peace protesters dispersed while the MAS mob regrouped.

13. (C) When police would still not allow the regrouped MASistas into Plaza Alvaro, the MAS mob marched approximately half a mile down Avenida Arce to the Hotel Radisson. The mob proceeded to throw stones at the hotel windows and chant "the Radisson is an ally of Pepe Lucho (governor of La Paz) and Doria Medina (head of the UN party), two political figures who do not support the MAS. Two large fifteen feet tall lobby windows were smashed. (Note: According to hotel owner Carlos Pacheco, he plans to write a letter to Minister Rada demanding police protection of the hotel and its guests. End note.) The crowd then proceeded one more block to the Plaza del Estudiante where it threw rocks and smashed out all of the City Cafe's windows while customers were inside. The City Cafe is owned by Prefect Pepe Lucho and the crowd chanted "Pepe finances the opposition." The MASistas then moved toward San Francisco Plaza where police forces successfully used tear gas to disperse the mob.

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION

14. (C) Emboff spoke with La Paz ex-City Councilman David Pringle, an advisor to the student movement, about the protest. Mr. Pringle insists that the movement is a grassroots movement which continues to grow. Pringle noted that the crowd consisted of young and old, and from all areas of La Paz, not just the affluent Zona Sur. Resident groups of Miraflores and Sopocachi zones participated as well. As

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the anti-Evo peace movement continues to grow political parties are starting to take note. Samuel Doria Medina from UN, Congressman Fernando Messmer from Podemos, party chiefs from ADN, and the two congresswomen assaulted in Plaza Murillo last week (Reftel) all participated in the gathering. According to Pringle the students will announce additional measures and he anticipates a groundswelling of support after the events of March 7.

GOVERNMENT IGNORES CALLS FOR PEACE

15. (C) Emboff was at an event with Human Rights Ombudsman Waldo Albarracin just prior to the peace protest. Albarracin told Emboff that he had called Minister of Government Rada and asked him to ensure that the gathering was peaceful and for the government not to bring in "its goons." Rada's response was to transfer the call to the Viceminister of Security who told Albarracin there would be police presence. Various protesters reported seeing Minister Rada on the outskirts of Plaza Alvaro during the clash. Given that the MAS mob walked a mile and specifically target Pepe Lucho's business lends credence to a more sophisticated organizational plan.

COMMENT

16. (C) The Plaza Alvaro incident is a demonstration of the intolerance of the Morales government. As Evo has arguably lost government control half of Bolivia, he can ill afford to lose the areas he does control. Thus, MAS militants are encouraged to resort to violence to silence dissent in La Paz. Up until now, the middle class of La Paz has been loath to publicly demonstrate its disapproval of the Morales government. That the government feels it necessary to apply strong-arm tactics to a small group of self-described "pacifists" says much about the government's authoritarian streak. End comment.
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